

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
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INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY LISBON
USNMR SHAPE
USMISSION USNATO
USCINCEUR
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 02609

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: ELECTIONS 1978: THE SOCIALIST PARTY
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SUMMARY. BARRING THE TOTALLY UNEXPECTED, THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) SHOULD BE OFFICIALLY CROWNED MARCH 12 AS THE "FIRST PARTY OF FRANCE" WITH WELL OVER SEVEN MILLION VOTES. BUT THAT DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT THE PS WILL BE ABLE TO USE THAT POSITION TO ENTER THE GOVERNMENT. IN THE FACE OF COMMUNIST (PCF) REFUSAL THUS FAR

TO ACCEPT AN ELECTORAL AGREEMENT, PS STRATEGY FOR THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS HAS FOCUSED ON THREE OBJECTIVES:

- WIN BIG ON THE FIRST ROUND;
- CAMPAIGN STRICTLY AGAINST THE MAJORITY;
- WHILE DOING ALL POSSIBLE TO ENCOURAGE THE PCF TO RETURN TO THE UNION OF THE LEFT FOLD.

MAKING THE BEST OF AN UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION, THE SOCIALISTS NO LONGER LOOK TOWARD MARCH AS THE CULMINATING EVENT OF MODERN POLITICAL HISTORY, BUT AS A WAYSTATION ON THE ROAD TOWARD YET ANOTHER ROUND OF LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE AND THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST IN 1981 OR EARLIER. READY TO GOVERN IF THE SITUATION ARISES, PREFERABLY WITH THE PCF BUT ALONE (WITH THE LEFT RADICALS) IF NECESSARY, THE PS IS NOT OVERLY OPTIMISTIC WITH REGARD TO POTENTIAL COMMUNIST SUPPORT AND IS THUS PREPARING ITSELF FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LETDOWN WHICH WOULD FOLLOW A LEFT DEFEAT ON MARCH 19. THE SUREST WAY TO WEATHER THAT STORM IS SEVEN MILLION VOTES ON MARCH 12. END SUMMART.

1. BRING ME YOUR SEVEN MILLION: THE SOCIALIST PARTY PROGRAM FOR MARCH 1978 CAN BE SUMMARIZED IN THREE OBJECTIVES:

- STRENGTHEN THE PARTY, WITH THE AIM NOT ONLY OF WINNING THE ELECTIONS, BUT ALSO INCREASING THE NUMBER OF MILITANTS AND EVEN MORE IMPORTANT-

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LY DEMONSTRATING THAT PS POPULAR SUPPORT WARRANTS THE TITLE OF "FIRST PARTY OF FRANCE", I.E., SEVEN MILLION OR MORE VOTES ON THE FIRST ROUND;

- INTENSIFY THE BATTLE AGAINST THE MAJORITY, REFUSING ANY HINT OF SYMPATHY FOR REFORMIST OR SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC OPTIONS WHILE REMAINING FIRMLY BEHIND THE COMMON PROGRAM AS THE ONLY VIABLE SOLUTION TO CURRENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ILLS;
- DO WHATEVER IS POSSIBLE TO ENCOURAGE THE UNION OF THE LEFT STRATEGY AND TO BRING THE PCF AT LEAST TO ELECTORAL ACCORD IF NOT TO PROGRAMMATIC AGREEMENT.

2. THE GREAT UNKNOWN: UNFORTUNATELY FOR PS CALCULATIONS, EVEN THE BEST OF PROGRAMS RUNS AFOUL OF THE GREAT UNCERTAINTY KNOWN AS "COMMUNIST INTENTIONS." SOCIALIST PLANNING HITS A DEAD END ON THE EVENING OF MARCH 12 WHEN THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF THE FRENCH LEFT PASSES FROM PS HANDS INTO THOSE OF THE PCF. REGARDLESS OF SOCIALIST STRENGTH ON THE FIRST ROUND -- BE IT 30 PERCENT

(ABOUT 7.5 MILLION VOTES), MORE OR LESS -- THE COMMUNISTS WILL RETAIN A VIRTUALLY ABSOLUTE VETO OVER THE NUMBER OF LEFT DEPUTIES WHO WILL EMERGE ONE WEEK LATER AND HAVE IT WITHIN THEIR POWER TO SEND ANYWHERE FROM 180 TO 80 PS DEPUTIES INTO THE NEW ASSEMBLY.

3. AS FRUSTRATING AS IT MAY BE, THE PS HAS NO ALTERNATIVE. FIRMLY LOCKED INTO THE UNION OF THE LEFT STRATEGY

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SINCE 1972, THERE IS NO QUESTION OF ABANDONING A HERETO-
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FORE WINNING CONCEPT TWO MONTHS BEFORE THE ULTIMATE
TEST. A CHANGE OF COURSE IS PRAGMATICALLY IMPROBABLE --
THE CURRENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM RENDERS COALITIONS IMPERA-
TIVE -- AND IDEOLOGICALLY UNSALABLE -- THE MODERN PARTY
IS UNQUESTIONABLY BASED ON A MARXIAN SOCIALISM. SUCH A
CHANGE IN THE SHORT TERM, EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER THE
ELECTIONS, IS FRAUGHT WITH DANGERS, NOT THE LEAST OF
WHICH IS FRAGMENTATION OF THE PS.

4. WHILE PARTY IMPLANTATION AND ORGANIZATION HAVE MADE
TREMENDOUS GAINS IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THERE IS UN-
QUESTIONABLY A CERTAIN FRAGILITY NOT ONLY TO THE PS
ELECTORATE BUT TO THE PARTY ITSELF WHICH CONTAINS DIVER-
SE ELEMENTS THUS FAR GLUED TOGETHER BY THE COMMON PRO-
GRAM AND FRANCOIS MITTERRAND. GIVEN THE MOMENTUM OF THE
LEFT COMMITMENT BUILT UP SINCE 1972, THE ABSOLUTE IMPOS-
SIBILITY OF EVEN CONSIDERING A VARIATION IN STRATEGY
BEFORE MARCH AND THE CONTINUING PRESENCE OF MITTERRAND,
THE PS HAS NOT SUFFERED THUS FAR FROM THE PSYCHOLOGICAL
SHOCK OF SEPTEMBER'S RUPTURE. IF ANYTHING, THE PARTY
SEEMS TO BE PICKING UP ADDITIONAL SUPPORT, AS BOTH
POLLS AND INFORMAL SOUNDINGS INDICATE THAT THE SOCIA-
LISTS COULD WELL SURPASS THE SEVEN MILLION TARGET. SOME
PARTY INSIDERS ARE EVEN WORRIED ABOUT OVERCONFIDENCE,
HARDLY THINKABLE A MONTH AGO BUT IN ANY CASE ONLY RELE-
VANT UNTIL MARCH 12.

5. THE FIRST ROUND COUNTS: FOR MOST SOCIALISTS, AN
OVERWHELMING DISPLAY OF FIRST ROUND ELECTORAL SUPPORT IS
AN END IN ITSELF FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

- PSYCHOLOGICALLY, THE PARTY WILL BE STRENGTHENED, ITS IDEOLOGY CONFIRMED, ITS MOMENTUM
GUARANTEED FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE;

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- THE COMMUNISTS WILL BE "PLACED BEFORE THEIR
RESPONSIBILITIES," FORCED EITHER TO PUBLICLY
OPT FOR LEFT DEFEAT IN THE FACE OF A POPULAR
MAJORITY OR TO RELUCTANTLY COOPERATE;
- WITH NEARLY EVERYONE IN THE PS AGREED THAT

MARCH IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP TOWARD POWER --
TO BE FOLLOWED BY NEW LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS
WITHIN A YEAR AND THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST IN
1981 OR SOONER, CONFIRMATION OF SOCIALIST
APPEAL IS PERHAPS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN
WINNING PARLIAMENTARY SEATS.

THERE IS NOTHING THE COMMUNISTS CAN DO ON MARCH 12 EX-
CEPT COMPETE AND COMPARE THE RESULTS, THUS EXPLAINING
THEIR MASSIVE EFFORT TO BRING OUT THE PCF VOTE ON THE
FIRST ROUND. THE SOCIALISTS ARE CONFIDENT THAT HISTORY
IS ON THEIR SIDE AND THAT SEVEN MILLION VOTES WILL DE-
MONSTRATE IT TO COMMUNISTS AND OTHER FRENCHMEN ALIKE.

6. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?: BUT LOST IN THE MIDST
OF THIS HEADY CONFIDENCE IS THE FACT THAT VOTES MUST BE
TURNED INTO DEPUTIES AND DEPUTIES INTO A PARLIAMENTARY
MAJORITY. IF IN FACT THE PCF IS DETERMINED TO REVERSE
THE BALANCE OF FORCES ON THE LEFT, MEANING THAT THE
UNION OF THE LEFT TACTIC IS GOING NOWHERE EITHER IN
1978 OR BEYOND, THEN THE PS SHOULD BE FACED IN THE NOT
TOO DISTANT FUTURE WITH A CRITICAL STRATEGIC QUESTION
WITH IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR PARTY UNITY AND FOR
FRANCE AS A WHOLE. SOCIALISTS ARE ABSOLUTELY ADAMANT
THAT NOTHING CAN SHAKE THEM FROM THEIR COMMITMENT TO
THE LEFT (AS DEFINED IN FRENCH TERMS), BUT AT THE SAME
TIME, NEARLY FORTY PERCENT OF THE PS ELECTORATE SAYS IT
WOULD FAVOR SOME VARIATION OF A LEFT-CENTER, SOCIAL DE-
MOCRATIC EXPERIENCE, WITH ONLY 29 PERCENT REMAINING COM-
MITTED TO A LEFT ALLIANCE. WHILE NO ONE CAN PREDICT
WHERE SUCH PRESSURES MAY EVENTUALLY TAKE THE PARTY, THE
OPTIONS ARE GENERALLY LIMITED TO TWO CATEGORIES:
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-- MAINTAINING THE CURRENT LINE IN THE HOPE THAT
THE PCF WILL SOME DAY "REALLY" CHANGE, EVEN IF
IT MEANS 10, 15, OR 20 YEARS MORE IN OPPOSI-
TION;

-- MOVING TOWARD SOME SORT OF ACCOMMODATION WITH
REFORMIST FORCES, IMPLYING A REDUCTION OF MORE
EXTREME PROGRAMMATIC (OR SHOULD IT BE PRAGMA-
TIC) DEMANDS, SUCH AS NATIONALIZATION.

THE SECOND CASE IS UNTHINKABLE AT PRESENT IDEOLOGICALLY,
THE FIRST IS PROBABLY UNTENABLE ELECTORALLY IN THE LONG
RUN -- THAT IS THE PS DILEMMA IF THE COMMUNISTS ABAN-
DON THE UNION OF THE LEFT STRATEGY IN 1978.

7. UNION ABOVE ALL: MORE LIKELY, HOWEVER, FROM THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 PARIS 02609

SOCIALIST POINT OF VIEW, IS AT LEAST A LIMITED DEGREE OF

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PCF ELECTORAL COOPERATION. THAT HOPE KEEPS THE PS GOING FULL SPEED AND IS EMBODIED IN ITS OBJECTIVES OF ENCOURAGING UNION IN WHATEVER WAY POSSIBLE. MITTERRAND HAS ALREADY PLEDGED THAT SOCIALIST CANDIDATES WILL WITHDRAW ON THE SECOND ROUND IN FAVOR OF BETTER PLACED COMMUNISTS. PS CANDIDATES ARE LIKEWISE UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO AVOID UNNECESSARY POLEMICS WITH THE PCF AND TO RUN AN ANTI-MAJORITY CAMPAIGN. THROUGHOUT ALL OF THIS, THE PS HOPES TO DEMONSTRATE ITS TOTAL FIDELITY TO THE COMMON PROGRAM AND THE UNION OF THE LEFT, THEREBY PLACING THE BLAME FOR AN EVENTUAL LEFT DEFEAT SQUARELY ON THE COMMUNIST DOORSTEP WHILE MAINTAINING PS CREDENTIALS AS A TRULY "LEFT" PARTY. THE TACTIC IS LOGICAL AND IN TRUTH THE ONLY ONE AVAILABLE IN MARCH 1978 -- ITS POTENTIAL EFFECTIVENESS, HOWEVER, MUST BE LABELED PROBLEMATIC AT BEST IN THE FACE OF A PCF WHICH HAS MADE NO SECRET OF ITS DESIRE TO CRUSH THE SOCIALISTS.

8. THE SOCIALIST EDGE: REGARDLESS OF CURRENT CONSTRAINTS, THE PS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY EMERGE MARCH 12 AS THE MOST POPULAR PARTY IN FRANCE. THERE IS ALSO LITTLE QUESTION THAT THE PS HAS CAPTURED THE IMAGINATION OF THE LARGEST SHARE OF THAT ELUSIVE, FLOATING ELECTORATE WHICH WANTS CHANGE, BUT NOT AT ANY COST. MORE THAN ANY OTHER PARTY, FOR THOSE FRENCHMEN WHO HAVE SIMPLY HAD "ENOUGH" AFTER NEARLY TWENTY YEARS OF GAULLIST PREDOMINANCE, THE PS IS THE MOST VIABLE OPTION. FOR THOSE WHO FEEL THAT FRENCH LIFE IS TOO CENTRALIZED OR LACED WITH SOCIAL INEQUALITIES, THE SOCIALISTS ARE AGAIN THE MOST LIKELY RECIPIENT OF VOTE SUPPORT. THESE FACTORS AND OTHERS HAVE HELPED BRING THE PS FROM NEAR DEATH IN 1969 TO THE FOREFRONT OF POPULAR IMAGINATION IN 1978. WIN OR LOSE IN MARCH, THE SOCIALISTS HAVE TAPPED AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL

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CURRENT WHICH WILL CONTINUE TO PAY DIVIDENDS FOR YEARS TO COME.
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